REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI AT
USTELECOM FORUM ON REINVENTING BROADBAND MAPPING

WASHINGTON, DC

MARCH 21, 2019

It's a pleasure to be with you this afternoon. Thank you to Jonathan Spalter and everyone at USTelecom for your focus on improving the identification of the people and places in our country that lack access to high-speed Internet connectivity.

As many of you know, since my first day as Chairman, my number one priority has been closing the digital divide and bringing the benefits of the Internet age to all Americans.

I'm pleased to report that by almost every meaningful metric, America's broadband networks have been expanding and improving. For example, 2018 was a record-breaking year for fiber deployment in the United States, with buildout to nearly six million additional homes. And the average fixed broadband download speed in the United States increased by more than 35% over the prior year, according to a report from Ookla.

But for all our progress, we've still got work to do. And a critical part of knowing how to focus our efforts involves knowing where those efforts are needed. We need to know where connectivity is, and just as importantly, where it isn't.

The FCC's current data collection program was established in the previous century, way back in the year 2000—during the heyday of dial-up Internet access. This program requires carriers to submit information to the FCC twice a year using what we call Form 477. Many people believe that this program has started showing its age, and I'm certainly one of them.

That's why, under my leadership, the Commission began to explore ways to improve the quality, accuracy, and usefulness of the data we collect on fixed and mobile broadband service. We have sought public input on how to make the data we get more granular and standardized.

Having accurate broadband deployment data is important to the FCC's work for a lot of reasons.

First, our decision-making should be based on rigorous analysis. That's why we established a new Office of Economics and Analytics. The "Analytics" part of that title depends on accurate broadband deployment data. Such data lets us know if our policies are working or if adjustments are needed.

Second, good broadband deployment data helps the Commission target our policies and resources as effectively as possible. Our universal service programs operate on a fixed budget funded by American taxpayers. So we need to make sure we're getting the most bang for the buck. An accurate snapshot helps us make sure these scarce resources go to the places most in need.

And third, broadband deployment data empowers consumers. Accurate information on Internet access options can be useful if you're moving to a new area and trying to decide where you want to live, or if you're dissatisfied with your current service and want to change providers.

It's with this context that I'm pleased that U.S. Telecom, along with broadband industry partners ITTA and WISPA, are taking up the cause. The mapping pilot project they are announcing today is intended to help flesh out the record in our Form 477 reform proceeding. By testing new ideas on the ground, it is my hope that this pilot and similar initiatives will give the Commission and other stakeholders useful information to consider as we move ahead. I look forward to seeing the results of this new pilot project. By improving our understanding of the connectivity gaps in our country, we can improve our ability to close those gaps and achieve our overriding goal: bringing digital opportunity to all Americans.

Thank you once again to USTelecom for bringing your energy and expertise to this issue. We're watching closely.